

# Chapter 16

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

---

Prostitution



## Prostitution

### A Prostitution Problem in Champaign, Ill.

By the late 1980s, despite police efforts, a prostitution problem in downtown Champaign, Ill., had not subsided. Champaign police officer Chase Leonhard, among others, was frustrated with the high recidivism rate among prostitutes:

Extended incarceration seemed inappropriate, because the prostitutes were almost status offenders; they were all addicts. Arrest [provided only] temporary relief. Prostitutes were stopping cars and blocking traffic, asking if the male drivers wanted a date. Collateral crimes, including theft, robbery, assaults, and "john rolling," caused a significant draw on police resources. Complaints were received from local merchants, citizens and members of the city council, making this problem the number one priority for enforcement action by the Champaign Police Department.

When Leonhard left the department to become an assistant state's attorney, he remained interested in the problem. He believed that extra police patrols and enforcement of motor vehicle and traffic laws in the area did little to lessen it. In fact, the greater the police presence, the less impact it had. Leonhard noted:

The prostitutes seemed to actually enjoy the attention being given to them, and became even more brazen. Anonymous citizens reported that the prostitutes were flagging down their customers by lifting up their dresses and opening up their blouses, exposing themselves, and were using finger and hand gestures to solicit their customers. When the prostitutes were stopped by officers, they proved to be surprisingly knowledgeable in the area of traffic law that related to pedestrian responsibilities.

The prostitutes knew the law and developed ways to avoid citations and convictions. Leonhard decided something else should be tried. From 1983 through 1987, officers made nearly 300 prostitution-related arrests, but the problem persisted. Ninety percent of the prostitutes were repeat offenders; 15 chronic prostitutes held the lion's share of convictions. Major construction projects in the downtown area made it practically inaccessible, forcing prostitutes to migrate to an adjacent residential neighborhood. Neighbors complained that prostitutes used apartment-building foyers, church parking lots, driveways, and private alleys to have sex.

In Illinois, prostitution is a class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. State law mandates progressive discipline, so prostitutes never receive the maximum allowable sentence. Leonhard said, "Even in those cases that were not plea-bargained, a typical sentence for a first-offender misdemeanor prosti-



tute would be 12 months' probation, a fine and, perhaps, some public-service work." Prostitutes were rarely convicted; incarceration, even for recidivist prostitutes, was rare.

The city attorney suggested that officers use the city's anti-solicitation ordinance. However, this offered no long-term solution. A solicitation conviction merely resulted in a fine, and the cases were difficult to prove because defense attorneys argued the women were simply seeking rides home.

The police conducted reverse stings; female officers dressed as prostitutes and arrested "johns" for attempted patronizing. While in the state's attorney's office, Leonhard dismissed these cases because entrapment defenses were too difficult to refute without evidence of the johns' predisposition. Stings with male officers posing as customers provided a number of arrests, but the problem remained.

In 1989, the state legislature passed a law that made a third prostitution conviction a felony punishable by up to three years in prison. Leonhard said, "The initial promise of this new provision soon evaporated in light of the fact that many months – sometimes years – would pass before an offender would amass a criminal history sufficient to make her or him eligible for the enhanced felony sentencing." In addition, many judges disliked the law and favored a less-severe progressive-discipline approach, opting for longer probation terms rather than jail time.

Leonhard believed court-imposed travel restrictions might help. He asked the police department's crime analysis unit to analyze prostitution arrests over a five-year period. They found that 92 percent of 321 prostitution arrests occurred in a 12-square-block downtown area. Leonhard researched judicial case law across the nation. He said, "While the cases did not speak with one voice on the issue, the prevailing view appeared to be that such restrictions would be upheld, if not overly broad or onerous in their scope or effect." However, none spoke to travel restrictions for prostitutes in as large an area as was contemplated in this case. On a small scale, location banning was authorized in cases like shoplifting and trespassing, prohibiting the offender from returning to the store or location; however, Leonhard could find nothing in statutory or court authority about large-scale restrictions. He said, "I was sensitive to the right to travel granted by the Constitution's First Amendment, so I suggested that, as we pursued travel restrictions, we allow convicted prostitutes in the 12-block area for legitimate purposes – with a note from their probation officer."

Armed with a pin map showing the clustering of prostitutes in the 12-block area, Leonhard requested that the court impose a travel restriction on one chronic prostitute. Her defense attorney argued that this violated her constitutional right to travel. Leonhard countered that this restriction was permissible under the corrections code, which authorized imposing reasonable conditions on convicted offenders, if for a rehabilitative purpose. Leonhard believed the travel restriction would keep the prostitute away from potential customers, since the 12-block area was the only significant prostitution market in Champaign. If she had a legitimate need to be in the area, her probation officer could authorize it. The judge agreed.



Within two months, Champaign courts imposed travel restrictions on 13 chronic prostitutes. "This took care of the core of recidivist prostitutes," Leonhard said, adding that "Illinois law permits police to make on-view arrests of probationers found to be in violation of the conditions of their sentences." Police arrested convicted prostitutes found in the 12-block area without authorization, and immediately brought them before the court. The state's attorney then revoked their probation.

One defendant appealed the restriction to the state appellate court; the court upheld the trial judge's ruling. The next year, at a judge's request, the Illinois legislature codified travel restrictions, allowing them as a condition of probation when a rational basis for them was shown (as was established by the pin-map clustering).

Over the 18 months following the use of travel restrictions, street prostitution declined in Champaign by 90 percent. This held true for four years following the restrictions. In terms of displacement, a few prostitutes migrated to Urbana, a nearby city, and one or two ended up in jail on unrelated charges. As for the others, they abandoned the area, and some, perhaps, the profession.

Leonhard more recently assessed the prostitution problem, saying it is no longer chronic in Champaign. There are a few seasonal prostitutes; in the summer of 1997, there were three in the city. However, when assistant state's attorneys ask for travel restrictions, the problem ends. Leonhard said, "If you look up Champaign on the prostitution Internet web site, it now says, basically, don't go there."\*

*Editors' note: This project is significant for several reasons. Limiting access to the area (except for legitimate purposes) disrupted the market, separating prostitutes from customers. Leonhard relied on both his police and his legal training to devise a nontraditional solution to the problem. From his experience as a police officer, he understood the debilitating effect a street prostitution problem can have on a neighborhood. As an assistant state's attorney, he recognized that limited jail space can influence a judge's sentencing decisions. His police and legal training both sensitized him to safeguarding constitutional rights. Through his police experience, he knew the crime analysis unit could geographically plot the prostitution problem, which provided the basis for reasonably restricting convicted prostitutes' access to the area, without constitutional implications.*

## A Prostitution Problem in Nassau County, N.Y.

In 1994, Nassau County, New York, police officials noticed a sudden influx of massage parlors, especially in communities near the county's western border with Queens, New York City. There were 31 parlors in seven of the county's eight police districts. The parlors advertised their services in local newspapers and magazines, and employees handed out business cards at local gyms and supermarkets. The police learned that, while the businesses advertised that they offered massage therapy, they were unlicensed to do so, and were actually offering sexual services. Community activists wrote letters to the police department about the parlors and the police's seeming inability to

\*Sources: Project description submitted by Champaign Police Department in support of nomination for 1993 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing; personal communications with Chase Leonhard and Champaign Police Department personnel.

close them down. According to Fifth District Officer Bill Leahy, "Residents were afraid it was turning into 42nd Street." (Manhattan's 42nd Street was for years renowned for prostitution and sex clubs, though its image has improved more recently.)

Officer Leahy, assigned to the Fifth District problem-oriented policing team, began studying the problem by surveying community residents, vice squad members and patrol officers. They learned that most massage parlor employees were Korean or Hispanic. The vice squad had made arrests for code violations, prostitution, unauthorized use of a professional title, and unlicensed massages, but this had not stopped the illegal trade.

The POP team researched records in the county clerk's office and located the owners of the buildings in which the massage parlors were operating. They interviewed the owners and discovered that lease agreements had typically been executed under false representations by the parlor operators. They told building landlords they were operating physical-therapy centers or legitimate massage-therapy clinics. The owners often had problems finding the people who signed the leases, making civil remedies like injunctions difficult to obtain. When parlor operators altered the buildings' physical structure, violating building and fire codes, the property owners were admittedly lax in demanding compliance.

The various agencies that had some regulatory authority over the massage parlors, including the attorney general's office, health department and state education department, had different regulatory criteria and enforcement priorities. Consequently, many efforts to regulate the businesses were stalled, either in court or in the various bureaucracies. The U.S. Customs, Internal Revenue and Immigration and Naturalization services could not help the local police at the time. All the while, the parlors continued to operate illegally.

Finally, the POP team decided that the best strategy was to force the property owners to help them shut down the businesses. They notified the owners about building- and fire-code violations and fraudulent lease agreements that had been detected. They told the landlords they intended to cite them to put them on official notice of the violations. They also told the landlords that the absence of appropriate professional licenses and the fraudulent nature of the leases were sufficient grounds to evict the massage parlors. The education department was able to advise the police of whether parlor staff had professional licenses. The officers negotiated with the sheriffs department to give parlor-eviction processes top priority.

When property owners did not cooperate, police, fire marshals and building inspectors reinspected the massage parlors and cited the owners. The building violations could cost them from \$200 to \$1,000 a day. Fire-code violations could cost as much as \$5,000. The penalties tended to be stiffer for property owners than for tenants. Other properties the uncooperative landlords owned were also targeted for inspection and citation, as were businesses on the same property as the parlors. All this was intended to put as much pressure as possible on the owners to evict the unlawful ten-



ants; under existing laws, owners had the greatest leverage against such tenants. The officers asked the district attorney's office to file criminal charges for permitting prostitution and criminal nuisance against owners who refused to evict. Prosecutors agreed to do so, finding that code citations gave the owners sufficient legal notice of the illegal activities occurring on their property. Applying yet more pressure, the officers notified the properties' mortgage holders of the illegal activity, and suggested to them that the prostitution and consequent arrests could result in adverse publicity for them.

At the same time the officers were pressuring the property owners, they were also targeting the massage parlors' patrons through field interviews and traffic enforcement. They also solicited cooperation from the local newspapers, asking them to stop running ads for illegal parlors. The major regional newspaper, *Newsday*, finally stopped running ads after several requests from the police and county executive. It further changed its advertising policy to require a background check on businesses seeking to buy advertising space. The officers got the local gyms to agree to remove any parlor business cards posted on their bulletin boards. A local radio station interviewed the county executive and the police district commander about the problem, bringing more public attention to it.

The result of all these efforts was that all illegal county massage parlors were closed or vacated. Some parlors closed when notified of the eviction proceedings against them; the sheriff's department did not have to evict them. Some closed upon hearing of other evictions. The IRS began a criminal tax-evasion investigation of a person connected to the parlors. The police periodically review local newspapers and magazines and visit gyms, looking for parlor advertisements. Officers were working with attorneys to draft local legislation that would strengthen the county's authority to close down businesses that failed to meet all occupational and building requirements.

As a final step, the Nassau County police notified the Suffolk County and New York City police departments about their success in closing the massage parlors, and advised them to be vigilant should the parlors try to reopen in those jurisdictions.\*

*Editors' note: This project is notable for its dramatic success in closing down all known illegal massage parlors. Although doing so was not likely to seriously disrupt the prostitution trade, it curtailed a part of the trade that was so open and notorious that it undermined the public's confidence in the police. This project is also notable for the way officers used official influence on the property owners, compelling them to address the problem. While the owners may not have been directly responsible for the unlawful activity, they profited indirectly. The officers effectively shifted some of the costs of the parlors to the property owners, reducing their profits. In addition, the officers secured their supervisors' help, as well as the county executive's. This project was a semifinalist for the 1995 Webber-Seavey Award, sponsored by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and Motorola.*

---

\*Sources: "Illegal Massage Parlors/Houses of Prostitution," Nassau County Police Department narrative submitted in support of nomination for 1995 Webber-Seavey Award; project description submitted by Nassau County Police Department to Rana Sampson as part of NIJ-sponsored problem-solving project; supplemental correspondence from Officer Susan Giannone to Rana Sampson, June 2, 1995; supplemental correspondence from Officer William Leahy to Rana Sampson, June 20, 1995; personal communication with Leahy, June 15, 1995.

### **A Prostitution Problem in National City, Calif.**

In a three-block stretch near the I-5 freeway in National City, Calif., 20 to 30 prostitutes worked the street. The area was one of the city's main entry points. The National City Police Department noted that "the problem had existed for years, but had recently grown in size." Drugs, robberies and thefts were prevalent in the surrounding area.

Sgt. L. Brent Roark and his neighborhood policing team (Officers Joseph Florentino, Patrick Kelley and Matthew O'Deane) conducted a community survey to find out more about the problem. Crime analysis provided the officers with information on calls for service and geographically mapped hot spots, or repeat-problem locations. The officers surveilled the area to get a better sense of how the prostitution market operated. This also helped them to understand the connection between area physical conditions and the prostitution market. They videotaped prostitutes as they solicited customers, or "johns." They interviewed johns to learn why they frequented the area, what the pay scale was, what their prior and family histories were, what their sources of income were, whether they or the prostitutes used drugs, whether pimps were involved, and how they perceived police activity.

The surveys, surveillance and interviews helped the officers tailor their responses. They calculated that, overall, 500 prostitutes were working the area, some only intermittently. Some were "circuit girls" (perhaps 30%), those who moved on to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland when things heated up; others were local. Some of the locals were full-time prostitutes (perhaps 50%); others (perhaps 20%) "supplemented their income by prostituting on weekends," according to Sgt. Roark. The circuit girls often used aliases. If police arrested them, they would fail to appear in court, skip town, and return perhaps six months later, using new names. By then, Roark said, "most officers had forgotten them, or at least the aliases they previously used." The circuit girls were less dependent on drugs and made, "conservatively, at least \$500 a day," according to Roark.

Prostitutes made money, but the physical cost was high: Officers recorded numerous incidents of johns robbing, beating or raping prostitutes, as well as incidents of pimps and prostitutes victimizing johns. Police identified at least 60 pimps and panderers (those who steered johns to the prostitutes).

Sgt. Roark believed the nearby budget-rate hotels and motels contributed to the problem. In 1996, they generated 538 calls for service. Two motels accounted for 67 percent of the calls. Police met with the hotel and motel managers. Prostitution was the only business many of them could count on, because the number of legitimate guests had dropped dramatically.

In prior years, special police units tackled the problem, and if they were understaffed, patrol officers provided additional enforcement. Enforcement was the main tool, but some officers were more creative. Sgt. Roark said, "At times, officers would physically escort groups of prostitutes down the street at the front bumper of a police cruis-





er, until reaching the city-limit boundary between National City and San Diego . . ." Jail overcrowding prevented the misdemeanor incarceration of prostitutes, so police used cite-and-release, which simply created a revolving door for citations and warrants issued for failure to appear. Roark said the johns knew they had little risk of arrest:

[They] knew that, based upon the sheer number of motorists in the area, chances of being stopped and identified as a john cruising the area [were] remote. Even if stopped, the worst-case scenario usually produced a field interview. Further, information was being provided on the Internet about the area, providing directions, including specific off-ramps, and naming . . . National City for those looking for prostitutes. Further, the physical environment had steadily deteriorated, adding to the perception that "nobody cared" and that criminal activity was "expected" to occur there.

With the analysis completed, the police team focused on environmental and legal responses to the problem. They worked with San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) to add lighting and upgrade wattage. At the team's request, "SDG&E modified power utility boxes in the area, preventing the use of them as benches or leaning rails," according to Sgt. Roark. The team asked that slat fencing be woven into a chain-link fence to obscure the view, so johns could not pick out dates from the highway. (Vegetation will be added to further limit freeway viewing.) With the help of the San Diego County Pay Phone Owners' Association, the team removed four pay phones prostitutes used. To address the problem of repeat johns, the city attorney's office drafted an ordinance permitting officers to impound vehicles as public nuisances if used during an act of prostitution. One prosecutor handled all the team's cases; this vertical prosecution ensured that arrests did not slip through the cracks.

To address the prostitutes, the team tried several strategies. They focused on decreasing the amount of money prostitutes made. When they arrested prostitutes, they seized their money, condoms and pagers as evidence. In the case of johns and pimps, the team had their vehicles towed when circumstances warranted. As part of an agreement with the San Diego Police Department, National City officers ignored city boundaries for the purposes of prostitution arrests; offenders could no longer elude arrest simply by crossing the border street between the two cities. The team identified and fingerprinted prostitutes, eliminating their ability to come back months later under an alias. The team also developed a file system containing all the prostitutes' names and known aliases, allowing for cross-referencing.

National City contracted with San Diego for misdemeanor jail space, so that prostitutes did some time for their offenses. The team employed a little-used state vehicle code authorizing courts to suspend the driving privileges of those convicted of prostitution within 1,000 feet of a private residence, if a vehicle was used. In addition, the team encouraged county welfare to pursue investigations of some of the prostitutes who were getting government aid. Sgt. Roark said, "The team also arranged for a social-service counselor to be available during sting operations, in the event a prostitute



decided to leave the business and wanted help with drug rehab or counseling." The team also gave arrested prostitutes a social-service referral pamphlet.

To slow prostitution at the hotels and motels, the officers requested, and the city council adopted, an ordinance requiring hotels and motels to have customers show a valid picture ID before providing a room. Sgt. Roark said, "The team found that few prostitutes carry valid ID, and johns are reluctant to use their real names and addresses."

The team found that many johns were Navy personnel, perhaps as many as 50 percent when they first started the project. The team considered asking the Navy to make this National City area off-limits, but decided not to because Navy personnel would be prohibited from legitimate area activity. Instead, they arranged with the Navy for a follow-up policy on all arrests. The team would turn arrestees over to Shore Patrol, and their command would be notified. This would eliminate johns' anonymity. To dampen Navy personnel's interest in the prostitutes, the team drafted and disseminated a letter (with the Navy Base Safety Committee's help) to all commands. Sgt. Roark said it "outline[d] the dangers and possible repercussions associated with prostitution activity."

Officers targeted some of the neighborhood houses analysis identified as contributing to the problem. These have since been renovated. For those pimps on probation or parole, the team successfully sought changes to their release conditions, excluding them from the targeted area. Finally, the team enlisted the media's aid. This rallied public support for the project, and also alerted johns to the team's intensive problem-solving effort.

Sgt. Roark commented on the strategies' impact: "The results were immediate and dramatic." He said the team interviewed prostitutes who were leaving the area for good. He also noted: "[T]he hotels and motels reported a more favorable clientele. In the three months following completion of the project, calls for service at the six area motels dropped 66.86 percent, compared [with] the same period the previous year. Prostitutes in the area are now the exception, not the norm."

The team is also checking whether displacement has occurred. Sgt. Roark said, "The team uses a countywide crime-information system to track for displacement, monitoring the movements of offenders in terms of arrests, cites, field interviews, etc., as they appear in other jurisdictions."\*

*Editors' note: This effort is notable on a variety of fronts. First, the team did an in-depth analysis, particularly on the offenders. This helped them determine why the area attracted prostitution, and allowed them to make lasting environmental changes. The hotels and motels, having to verify IDs, can now be held accountable for activity on their property. The team enlisted the Navy, whose employees accounted for a lot of the johns, to become a capable guardian over its personnel. The team, with all their tailored responses, seems to have transformed what was once a prostitution bazaar into a high-risk, low-reward location for the activity.*

---

\*Sources: Presentation at San Diego Police Department's April 1997 Problem Analysis Advisory Meeting, open countywide to police and guests; "Roosevelt Avenue Project: Anti-Prostitution Project," submitted by National City Police Department in consideration for the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing; San Diego Union-Tribune article, March 17, 1997.

## Additional Editors' Comments on Prostitution Problems

While prostitution has been around for a long time, police responses to it (e.g., citations, reverse stings and arrests) have remained the same for several decades. Police and community groups have recently tried new approaches based on a better understanding of prostitution markets, after looking at the markets' economics and health risks, and the environmental conditions that allow them to flourish. More recent strategies include altering street traffic and parking patterns, pushing local judges to reassess their sentencing practices, using civil laws, offering social services, educating "johns," shaming johns, discouraging those facilitating prostitution, and engaging outraged communities.

The editors found several other projects of note. In San Diego, in response to 60-plus prostitutes working a commercial strip, a sergeant asked merchants to seek temporary restraining orders (TROs) in civil court against the prostitutes. The sergeant learned that many of the strip's prostitutes would stick around only as long as business was profitable and, as "circuit girls," would move on to northern cities to maintain their income. The judge agreed to TROs against many of the prostitutes, which prohibited them from flagging down motorists, loitering on corners and engaging in other solicitation-like behavior within 100 yards of the plaintiffs/merchants. Violating a TRO resulted in five days in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Almost overnight, the prostitutes left the area, and nearby hotels reported increased legitimate business from customers staying more than one night.

A Newport News, Va., officer documented 28 prostitutes in a 26-block area. He enlisted the commonwealth's attorney to seek a judicial order, in lieu of jail time, restricting convicted prostitutes from the area. The judge agreed. When prostitutes established a brothel in an abandoned building, the officer brought in the buildings department, which condemned the property based on unsafe conditions. Some prostitutes used a local parking lot for trysts, knowing that Virginia police cannot enforce trespassing laws on private property. The officer contacted the owner and suggested he change the lot to paid-parking and have a tow company tow trespassing vehicles (driven by johns and pimps) from the lot, at the vehicle owners' expense. Some remaining prostitutes conducted business in bars and local motels. The officer worked with the Alcohol Beverage Control Board and gave each bar owner a copy of the law, which prohibited lewd conduct and made it illegal for bars to be meeting places for "persons of ill repute." The officer gave motels copies of local laws, which prohibited registering guests under an alias and renting a room more than once in a night. The bar and motel operators immediately complied. A time-series evaluation of the effort showed that the number of prostitutes in the area declined from 28 to six, a reduction of over 75 percent.

In St. Petersburg, Fla., with the proceeds from convicted johns' fines, officers helped establish a program for prostitutes, to turn their lives around. A residential treatment center (modeled after one in Reseda, Calif., called the Mary Magdalene Project) uses



a case-management approach and offers classes and counseling as part of court-ordered sentencing. Due to the program's recent implementation, it is too early to assess its effectiveness in dissuading prostitutes.

In Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to minimize assaults against prostitutes, social workers alert prostitutes of patterns of abuse by johns and provide timely information on dangerous customers. Also in Edmonton, as part of a separate problem-solving effort, residents developed a better understanding of the magnitude of a local prostitution market by documenting how many cars entered the hot-spot area between midnight and 1 a.m.

In San Francisco, Calif., convicted johns attend a class on the ills of prostitution, taught, in part, by former prostitutes. Washington, D.C., police altered traffic and parking patterns to discourage johns from circling an area for prostitutes. In San Bernadino, Calif., residents picketed local motels catering to prostitution. Baltimore County, Md., police informed residents of defendants' court dates in prostitution-related cases. Police believe this boosted judicial accountability and increased offenders' sentencing. In Des Moines, Iowa, neighborhood residents write down johns' license plate numbers and ask the motor vehicle department for vehicle-ownership information. The residents follow with letters to the registered owners, notifying them that the vehicle's driver was seen with a prostitute, and asking that the activity stop.



# Chapter 17

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

---

Robbery



## Robbery

### A Robbery Problem in Gainesville, Fla.

In the spring of 1985, a barrage of convenience-store robberies in Gainesville, Fla., led the Gainesville Police Department to conduct an exhaustive study of the problem. Led by Planning Coordinator Patrick Callahan, the department researchers wanted to isolate those factors that made convenience stores an attractive target to robbers. They also hoped to identify other jurisdictions nationwide that had successfully dealt with the problem.

Toward the latter objective, the researchers contacted the International City Management Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police and Local Government Information Network. In addition, they contacted the National League of Cities, National Referral Center, National Association of Convenience Stores, Police Foundation, National Crime Prevention Council, Southland Corp., National Criminal Justice Reference Service, and American Society of Association Executives.

This research pointed them to the state of Ohio, where some interesting things were being done. Several cities had ordinances mandating certain robbery-prevention policies and procedures, such as training clerks, keeping minimal cash on hand at night, installing drop safes, putting up signs advertising the safes, maintaining clear views of counters from the street, and having adequate lighting in parking lots. The city of Kent, Ohio, also required that two clerks be on duty during late-night hours. The city of Coral Springs, Fla., adapted the Kent ordinance, offering both gas stations and convenience stores the option of installing locked pay booths in lieu of having two clerks on duty.

Whereas the other Ohio cities with robbery-prevention ordinances showed moderate declines in robberies after adopting the ordinances (ranging from a slight decrease in one city to a 30% decrease in another), Kent experienced a 74 percent decline (from 19 to five) after adopting its ordinance. Coral Springs dropped from three to zero robberies, and consistently had fewer robberies than surrounding towns.

The researchers reviewed Gainesville convenience-store robbery reports filed over the past five years. They learned there were 47 convenience stores in Gainesville, 45 of which had been robbed at least once. The distribution of robberies at individual stores ranged from a low of one to a high of 14. Eighty-one percent of the stores had been robbed more than once. The distribution of robberies across the years studied ranged from 20 to 72, with the average being 39 per year. Convenience stores accounted for 50 percent of all business robberies during this five-year period. (Gas stations, liquor stores, banks, fast-food restaurants, retail stores, and other businesses each accounted for only 5% to 12% of the problem.) While nearly every convenience store had been robbed, much lower percentages of other types of businesses had been robbed. Seventy-five percent of the convenience-store robberies occurred between 7 p.m. and 5 a.m.



The focus of the analysis then shifted to how many people were present during the robberies. In 92 percent of the robberies, only one clerk was on duty. Since most stores had only one clerk working, this finding in itself was not remarkable. However, in 85 percent of the robberies, the robber waited for customers to leave, and thus was alone with the clerk while committing the crime. A second clerk was present in only 8 percent of the robberies, and one or more customers were present in only 7 percent of them. Even when a customer witnessed a robbery, in most instances, either the robber was unaware of the customer's presence, or the customer came onto the scene after the robbery was under way. This told the researchers that, in the overwhelming majority of convenience-store robberies, the robber believed there was only one other person present, namely, the clerk.

One chain of stores had put two clerks on duty 47 percent of the time, but significantly, 96 percent of the robberies at those stores occurred when only one clerk was present. Another chain, with five stores in the area, had, since 1982, adopted most of the standard robbery-prevention measures, including a two-clerk policy. Its stores were never robbed during the period of study. Remarkably, one of this chain's stores was only 100 yards away from a competitor's store that was robbed 11 times during the period. A third chain of stores had adopted many standard robbery-prevention measures, but not the two-clerk policy. This chain's stores were the second most frequently robbed in the area.

Beginning in the spring of 1985, Gainesville Police Department officials began meeting with representatives of the convenience-store industry to try to get their voluntary cooperation in preventing robberies. The discussions quickly turned to two-clerk policies. Representatives of one chain's parent corporation cited a study the corporation had commissioned that concluded that the presence of two clerks did not deter robbers. The researchers in this study interviewed robbers in prison. Gainesville police officials doubted the study's reliability for several reasons. First, it was based on robbers' self-reporting. Second, only 22 percent of the robbers interviewed had robbed convenience stores. Third, the research was primarily concerned with the economic impact on the funding corporation. Finally, the evidence conflicted with Gainesville's experience.

Gainesville police officials next had their own research audited by the city's auditor, who found no methodological flaws. At the police chief's request, a University of Florida forensic psychologist agreed to conduct an independent study, for which the city would not pay him. They further agreed that the findings would be published, regardless of the outcome. The psychologist conducted a three-tiered study that included interviews of incarcerated convenience-store robbers and victim clerks, and an analysis of robbery data. Both the robbers and the clerks indicated that the presence of two clerks was a significant robbery deterrent. The psychologist concluded that the robbers wanted to avoid potential interference to the robbery, and avoid being identified. The data analysis showed, among other things, that stores with only one clerk on duty during any shift had a higher chance of being robbed. On the basis of his findings, the psychologist concluded that the presence of two clerks seemed to be the primary deterrent to Gainesville convenience-store robberies.





A Florida State University and Tallahassee Police Department consultant conducted yet another study of Gainesville convenience-store robberies. He, too, concluded that the presence of two clerks was the main deterrent to them. Finally, Dr. C.R. Jeffery, a Florida State University criminologist renowned for his work in crime-prevention-through-environmental-design, and two of his doctoral students similarly concluded that the presence of more than one clerk was among the best deterrents to convenience-store robberies. Their study analyzed Tallahassee convenience-store robberies.

In the year of meetings between the Gainesville Police Department and the convenience-store industry, the industry's only conclusion was that the police should provide more officers to patrol and to investigate robberies. Most area convenience stores did not adopt even basic robbery-prevention measures, such as having adequate lighting and keeping windows clear. Robberies continued to increase.

In July 1986, after two public hearings and much debate, the Gainesville City Council passed an ordinance requiring that convenience stores maintain a clear view of the sales counter from the street, post signs indicating that minimal cash was on hand, keep a drop safe with a time release, maintain certain lighting, use security cameras, and train clerks in robbery prevention. The proposed two-clerk provision was not adopted, on the condition that the convenience stores implement a robbery-prevention plan that would reduce robberies by 50 percent from the previous 240-day period. This meant that there could be no more than 16 robberies. If such a reduction were not achieved, the two-clerk requirement would automatically go into effect.

The 16-robbery limit was exceeded within 60 days. Accordingly, the two-clerk ordinance went into effect in February 1987, with a 60-day grace period to allow stores to hire new clerks. The convenience-store industry filed suit in federal court, seeking an injunction against the adoption of the two-clerk provision. After reviewing the city's case, buttressed by the studies of the problem, the judge denied the motion, holding that the industry's economic interests would not be irreparably harmed; that there was no constitutional violation; and that granting the injunction would be counter to the public interest because the city had proved the ordinance's preventive value, and the industry's denial of a deterrent effect was unconvincing.

Through October 1987, six months after the ordinance went into effect, Gainesville convenience-store robberies declined by an astounding 65 percent from the same period of the previous year. Almost all of the decrease was accounted for by decreases during late-night hours (there was a 75% decrease in robberies between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m.). As of 1988, there were 18 robberies at convenience stores not exempt from the ordinance (a 70% decrease from 1986). Only three robberies occurred between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. (an 88% decrease from 1986).

The significant reduction in convenience-store robberies was not part of a bigger trend in crime reduction, as overall reported crime had increased by 63 percent since 1983. Nor was it due to a reduction in *all* robberies, as total reported robberies had increased by 122 percent since 1983. Arrest patterns revealed that only a few robbers



were linked to multiple robberies (no more than five per robber), so the reduction was not simply the result of the apprehension of repeat offenders.

Although convenience-store robberies declined throughout the county in 1987, the county trend reversed in 1988, with 57 percent more robberies than in 1986. Tallahassee convenience-store robberies also increased during this time frame. All this evidence pointed to the conclusion that the two-clerk requirement caused the dramatic decline in Gainesville convenience-store robberies. As of 1988, convenience-store robberies accounted for only 7 percent of Gainesville's business-robbery problem, compared with 50 percent before the ordinance was enacted.

From 1989 to 1993, the number of Gainesville convenience-store robberies continued to decline, reaching a low of seven in 1990. The six-year average before 1987 was 37 robberies per year. The six-year average after 1987 was 13 robberies per year, a 65 percent reduction. Perhaps even more importantly, in the six years before the ordinance was enacted, there were 18 serious injuries related to convenience-store robberies. In the six years after, there was only one.\*

*Editors' note: This project remains one of the outstanding examples of problem-oriented policing in action. The inquiry was rigorous and exhaustive, and the response followed logically from the problem analysis. The Gainesville Police Department's work was strong enough to persuade a federal court, as well as to influence the state of Florida to enact a stronger convenience-store robbery-prevention statute in 1990.*

### A Robbery Problem in Post Offices in New York City

In the fall of 1991, the U.S. Postal Service in the New York City metropolitan area began to experience a significant increase in armed robberies of employees and facilities. From 1987 to 1990, there was an average of fewer than 15 robberies reported per year. In 1991, 31 robberies were reported, and in 1992, 65 were reported. Robbers gained access to postal facilities either through unlocked rear doors or at lobby customer counters. They robbed some postal vehicles of the daily cash deposits collected from facilities. Theft of mail from mail-relay boxes (temporary-storage boxes on the street) was also increasing. In 1993, 1,350 such thefts were recorded. During the same period, robberies reported to the New York City Police Department significantly declined.

The Postal Service was concerned about several robbery-related problems:

- increased risk of physical and psychological harm to postal employees and customers,
- short-term loss of revenue,
- deterioration of labor-management relations,
- degradation of customer service, and
- longer-term loss of revenue due to eroding customer confidence.

---

\*Sources: "Convenience Store Robberies in Gainesville, Florida: An Intervention Strategy by the Gainesville Police Department," by Patrick T. Callahan, undated, with statistical updates; "Study of Safety and Security Requirements For 'At-Risk Businesses,'" Robert A. Butterworth, state of Florida Office of the Attorney General, January 1991.

Members of the Postal Inspection Service, the Postal Service branch primarily responsible for law enforcement, began analyzing the robbery problem with the involvement of the area's postal managers. They found that robbery of postal vehicles was the most common type, accounting for 58 percent of the total. Another 35 percent occurred via rear doors to facilities, and 7 percent occurred at customer counters. The project team set a goal of reducing robberies to the 1990 level or below. They further set conditions on the responses they would implement:

- They would not implement procedures that restricted or prevented customer service.
- They would consider short-term measures to enhance security, and long-term measures to restore employee and customer confidence.
- They would restore a perception that postal facilities were invulnerable.
- They would design flexible responses and would not knowingly increase the risk of displaced crime.
- They would follow up to ensure proper implementation.

The final response plan was multifaceted. The project team rejected some otherwise reasonable responses due to the above conditions or to financial impracticality.

The Postal Inspection Service assigned additional investigators to solve the crimes that had already occurred. They made over 130 arrests; 111 offenders had been convicted and sentenced when the project concluded.

Facility security specialists inspected every postal facility robbed. As part of the review, they analyzed neighborhood crime patterns and assessed each facility's likely target points (primarily rear doors and customer counters) for vulnerability. As a result, lighting was improved at some facilities, fencing was installed, and sophisticated access-control devices were installed, as appropriate. Uniformed postal police officers then conducted follow-up surveys of these facilities to monitor employees' compliance with various security measures. The officers often discovered unlocked rear doors and gates, or unauthorized people in restricted areas. One plan objective was to get postal employees to take greater responsibility for facility security.

The Postal Service installed bullet-resistant screenlines in over 75 percent of the area's facilities. Screenlines provided a protective barrier between employees and customers, while allowing them to communicate and conduct business. Postal inspectors had met with community leaders and local police officials to garner support for the installation of these devices. Video surveillance cameras were also installed in some facilities.

To reduce thefts of mail from relay boxes, a postal inspector developed a special lock known as a "Silver Bullet Lock." The new lock passed all field tests and was installed on boxes throughout the area. Uniformed postal police officers in high-profile vehicles increased their patrols around postal facilities. Postal inspectors and postal police officers visited post offices throughout the New York area to educate employ-



ees about robbery prevention and proper procedures during and after a robbery. They stressed the need to keep doors to restricted areas locked, to avoid counting money in public view, and to avoid talking to others about the presence of money in facilities. They met with labor-union leaders to get their cooperation in stressing a new security consciousness. They also met with New York City Police Department officials to encourage beat police officers to drop by postal facilities.

The Postal Service also developed an entirely new procedure for transporting cash. Previously, regular letter carriers picked up and transported cash (most of which came from the money-order service) during normal delivery rounds. The new procedure called for an armed escort, following unpredictable schedules, to pick up and transport cash.

The number of armed robberies dropped to 32 in 1993, and further dropped to 21 in 1994. Armed robberies continued to decline in 1995, 1996 and 1997. According to Assistant Inspector-in-Chief Joyce King, who oversaw the project, "We haven't had a single armed robbery of this type since we instituted the countermeasures." Thefts of mail from relay boxes decreased by 52 percent from 1993 to 1994, and by an additional 37 percent in 1995. Over 175,000 cash escorts had been made, without a single robbery attempt, at the project's conclusion. In addition, postal police officers noticed significant improvement in employees' compliance with security measures.\*

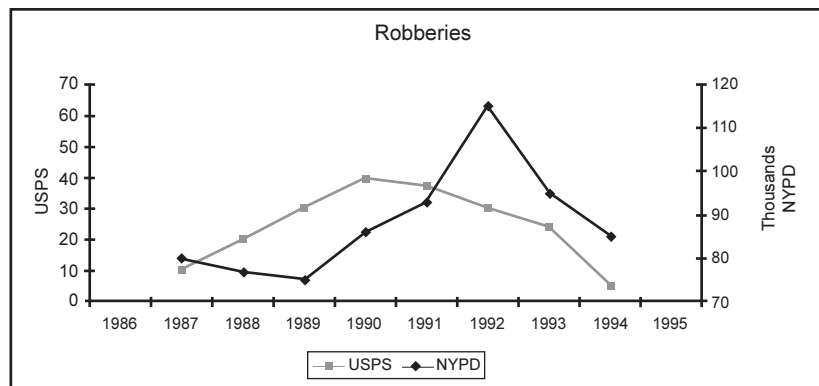


Fig. 1. Comparison of reported robberies: U.S. Postal Service and New York City Police Department

*Editors' note: This project is notable for both its scope and its positive impact on serious violent crime. Project staff used strategic planning methods that allowed them to achieve their immediate objectives without compromising their organization's core mission – to serve customers. The project was a finalist for the 1995 Webber-Seavey Award, sponsored by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and Motorola.*

\*Sources: "Armed Robbery Countermeasures," Postal Inspection Service, New York Division, submitted in support of application for the 1995 Webber-Seavey Award; correspondence from Assistant Inspector-in-Charge Joyce King, New York Division, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, July 29, 1997; personal communication with King, Oct. 9, 1997.

## Additional Editors' Comments on Robbery Problems

Willie Sutton, the notorious bank robber, when asked why he robbed banks, is often quoted as replying, "Because that's where the money is." If one could ask him why people robbed the convenience stores and postal facilities in the preceding case studies, he might say, "Because that's where the guardians aren't." The police problem-solvers in these case studies, while not discounting the value of investigation, arrest and incarceration of robbers, sought to strengthen potential robbery victims' defensive and preventive abilities. By hardening targets, adding potential witnesses to the crime, and making employees more vigilant, the police sought to increase potential robbers' estimations of the risks of robbing the establishments. The behavior of victims, presence of witnesses, and appearance of security measures all send signals to robbers, heightening risk and lessening the chance of reward. The police are learning how to fine-tune these signals to a variety of robberies.

The editors found other efforts of note. San Diego, Calif., police instruct convenience-store clerks to clean the checkout counter hourly, so if they are robbed, the offender's prints can be identified. In addition, they suggest that employees park their personal vehicles in front of the store during late-night hours, to deter robbers.

An Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, detective found that one gas station chain was repeatedly victimized. Seventeen of its stations had been robbed at least once, and one station had been hit eight times, for a total of 51 robberies and \$70,000 in reported losses. Upon further investigation, the detective found that some of the losses were due to robberies, while others were due to employee theft. As a result, the detective recommended removing cigarettes from easy-access areas, changing cash- and key-handling practices, and doing background checks on prospective employees.

Baton Rouge, La., police found the vast majority of commercial robberies were of convenience stores, especially those that sold gasoline and were open 24 hours a day. At their request, the city council passed an ordinance requiring 24-hour convenience stores to train employees in robbery prevention and install 35-mm security cameras, which could be triggered manually or through bait money. The police advertised the new ordinance to alert convenience-store operators and potential robbers. After some initial problems with implementation, police claim the effort has reduced robberies at these stores and has increased police clearance rates.





# Chapter 18

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

---

Theft From Vehicles





# Theft From Vehicles

## A Theft from Vehicle Problem in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Constable Doug Storey worked the downtown area in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. While there were problems with robbery and assault, one of the most common crimes was theft from vehicles. Not only is theft from vehicles irritating for victims – they lose clothes, money, stereos, and other valuables – but it is also troublesome for the police, who spend countless hours taking crime reports, with little hope of recovering the stolen property. In 1993, 13,078 Edmontonians were victims of theft from vehicles. As for the police, they spent an average of 15 minutes on each theft-from-vehicle crime report, over 3,200 hours a year documenting a crime that Storey was convinced was "completely preventable."

Storey identified several hot spots in the downtown area that accounted for a disproportionate percentage of the theft-from-vehicle locations: parking lots and garages, apartment-complex garages, and hotel parking areas. He devised a public awareness campaign, as well as crime-prevention-through-environmental-design improvements for the hot spots. The hotels were asked to give guests handouts warning them not to leave valuables in their vehicles. Storey also put together notices for the parking lots and garages; he asked management to mail them to monthly parkers, and asked garage security to hand them out to hourly parkers. He and Constable Mark Knoop sent more than 1,000 faxes about the problem to downtown-area businesses. Along with volunteers, they visited 127 downtown apartment complexes, and they arranged to speak at tenant meetings and hand out theft-from-vehicle prevention material. They spoke at the tenant meetings six months later to keep the issue fresh in the tenants' minds.

The constables also focused on the parking garages' physical construction and layout. They looked at entrances and exits, and developed controlled-access policies so that all those entering the garages would have to pass a guard, increasing the risk offenders took in committing crimes there. Warning posters were strategically placed in all garages.

The media were enlisted. Several newspapers helped by publishing supportive articles, and two TV stations carried top stories on preventing theft from vehicles in their morning, lunch-hour and evening news broadcasts.

Lastly, vehicle owners who continued to keep valuables in their vehicles were targeted with a more intensive intervention. Warning notices were placed on vulnerable cars. These warnings listed the most commonly stolen items: briefcases, purses, radar detectors, shopping bags, stereos, tapes, and tools. In addition, horse- and foot-patrol constables and community-service officers wrote down the license plate numbers of vehicles containing valuables. The plates were run, and volunteers called the vehicles' owners, reciting from a script that read as follows:



Hello. Would Mr. or Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ be in? (Once contact is made, the following is read). My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a volunteer with the Edmonton Police Service. I am calling to provide you with some crime-prevention advice that I hope you will consider using in the future. One of our neighborhood foot-patrol officers, while on patrol, noted your car parked in the downtown area, with property visible within the vehicle. Theft from auto is a preventable crime, simply by ensuring all of your valuables are removed from your car. The Edmonton Police Service does not want to see you become a victim of this senseless crime. Please take steps to remove all valuables from your car in the future. Thank you for taking the time to listen. If you wish further crime-prevention advice, please come into any of our division or neighborhood stations to pick up free literature, or to discuss your concerns with the constable on duty. Goodbye.

Sgt. McCartney, Storey's supervisor, in explaining this last, targeted intervention, said the constables believed that "if vehicle owners realized their own property is being surveyed [although not with the intent of theft], they may be more conscientious about locking it out of sight."

Through their focused efforts, the constables decreased theft from vehicles from 676 in a three-month period, to 500 in a four-month period, a decrease of over 50 percent. Some parking garages had no theft from vehicles during the first four months of the project.\*

*Editors' note: This project was a highly tailored and creative effort that sprang from the realization that theft from vehicles is "completely preventable." The constables focused on informing vehicle owners that removing valuables from vehicles prevents victimization. The constables targeted hot spots, and volunteers contacted vehicle owners who ignored crime-prevention information. Using volunteers was wise, making possible what would otherwise have been considered too costly an approach, due to the strategies' labor-intensive nature.*

### **A Theft from Vehicle Problem in Indianapolis, Ind.**

In October 1992, an Indianapolis trucking-company manager contacted the police department's south district community policing coordinator, Sgt. Dennis Rahn. He complained of a rash of thefts from tractor trailers parked on company property. Over the past three months, the company had lost approximately \$50,000 worth of merchandise. The company had reported few of these thefts, so the police had been unaware of the problem.

Sgt. Rahn met with the manager and arranged to have the police conduct an environmental survey of the property. Based on the survey, the police recommended that the manager increase lighting on the grounds; repair numerous holes in the perimeter

---

\*Sources: Paper submitted in support of nomination for 1994 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing; notes taken during panel presentation by Constable Doug Storey at 1994 Problem-Oriented Policing Conference in San Diego; conversations with Storey; supporting written material Storey sent to Rana Sampson as part of NIJ-sponsored problem-solving project.

fencing; cut down and remove overgrown trees and bushes that hindered patrolling police officers' view; and park trailers along the loading dock, rather than along the perimeter fence. The manager gave two key cards to patrol officers to allow them to enter and patrol the property.

According to the manager, most of the thefts were occurring between noon on Saturday and 8 a.m. the following Monday, the period when deliveries and pickups were suspended and the business office was closed. Most of the goods stolen – baby clothes, children's games and crayons – were packaged in relatively small, 3-by-2-foot cartons. Thieves were emptying trailers full of these cartons, so it was apparent that they were spending more than a few minutes at the scene. They occasionally took larger items, but usually discarded them a short distance from the property. The police and the manager concluded that the most likely possibilities were either that thieves were entering the property through the holes in the fence, or that employees were stealing the goods.

Beyond offering crime-prevention advice, the police department's response was conventional – they increased patrol to the area and surveilled the property for a few nights. These responses resulted only in the recovery of three stolen elevator motors. The manager was encouraged to report future losses to the police, while the police continued some preventive patrol.

Over the next two months, the company manager repaired the fencing several times, installed additional lighting, and cut down and removed the obstructing trees and bushes. These measures alone cost the company some \$25,000. During the winter months, the number of thefts dropped to about two per month; however, once the weather turned warm again, thefts occurred almost nightly.

As Sgt. Rahn continued his own personal development as the community policing coordinator, he studied the problem-oriented policing methodology more carefully. He continued meeting with the company manager and gathering information. While the number of thefts was increasing, and thefts were occurring on other days of the week, neither the manager nor the police were developing any suspects. Rahn had photographs taken of commonly stolen merchandise, and they were distributed to beat officers with flea markets or secondhand stores on their beats, in hopes that some property could be recovered and suspects identified.

In the meantime, the parent corporation notified the company manager that if the theft losses were not reduced, the business would be closed and relocated to northern Indiana. Such a move would deprive Indianapolis of a \$13-million-per-year business, and 150 jobs.

As he continued to analyze the problem, Sgt. Rahn looked more closely at the property's perimeter. The property was protected on three sides by fencing; a concrete wall bordered the fourth side, closest to the parking area. Here he concentrated his attention. The wall belonged to the city, as it was part of a levee system abutting the company's property. While the wall stood 10 to 12 feet above ground on the city's side, it



stood only 5 feet above ground on the company's side. When Rahn surveilled the area from the roof of a nearby business, he noticed tire tracks in the rain-softened ground leading up to the wall. Vehicles could reach this area from several entry points that led to the top of the levee. A burglar could park next to the wall, climb onto the vehicle, and make the short drop to the ground inside the wall. Once inside, a burglar would have the time and concealment to break into the trailers and, using a pallet as a ramp, hoist stolen goods over the wall. Police vehicles could not easily patrol this area because the levee had steep slopes, and the area was hidden from surrounding streets. The burglars were using four-wheel-drive vehicles or pickup trucks to navigate the terrain. Now that Rahn understood the method of operation, solutions became more obvious.

Rahn proposed placing a fence on top of the wall and blocking several entry points to the levee. He further proposed that the city pay for these measures, as the company had already spent a considerable amount of money, making a good-faith effort to cooperate with the police. Moreover, he argued, the city stood to lose tax revenue and jobs if the thefts did not stop. When Rahn's requests were finally forwarded to the public works department, he was told there was no money for the project. While serving on a mayoral committee that was promoting problem-oriented policing, Rahn told the mayor about the resistance he was encountering on this project. When the mayor intervened, the public works department became cooperative. Within a week, the levee entrances were blocked, and within two months, a 5-foot chain-link fence was erected on top of the wall. The total cost for these improvements was \$3,200.

Once the access points were blocked and the fence was erected, the burglaries stopped. The trucking company offered the police use of the building and parking area for surveillance to address a drug problem in a nearby park. Other trucking companies in the vicinity experienced no increases in theft during or after this project, suggesting that the crime was not merely displaced. The police maintain vigilance over the property, through routine patrolling. As of late 1995, when Sgt. Rahn transferred to another district, the burglaries at the trucking company had remained under control.\*

*Editors' note: This project is notable for the simple, yet effective, solution that followed logically from a proper understanding of the burglary method. Without that understanding, both the police and the victim had tried standard, but ineffective, strategies to stop the crimes. In addition, this project demonstrates how the police and a private company can view crime prevention as a partnership that, through mutual investment of resources, can yield mutual benefits. However, it often takes skillful negotiation to get all parties to recognize where their mutual interests lie.*

### A Theft from Vehicle Problem in Stockholm, Sweden

Djurgården is part of the Östermalm borough in Stockholm, Sweden. In 1995, Stockholm recorded a significant increase in theft from vehicles, particularly in the

---

\*Sources: "Problem-Solving Helps Indy Keep Trucking," by Dennis Rahn and Kenna Davis Quinet, Law Enforcement News, Volume 22, No. 438, Jan. 31, 1996; personal communication with Rahn, Oct. 27, 1997.

parking lots near some of the city's best-known restaurants. Most of the crimes occurred at lunch- and dinnertime, when the restaurants were crowded with diners. Typically, a thief broke a car window and stole items such as cellular telephones and stereos. Thieves often disabled car alarms by cutting the cables or smashing the flashing warning indicators.

Mounted police officers teamed up with community police officers to devise a solution to the problem. They formed a task force with representatives from the local governmental administration, local housing agency, street department, and private-parking companies. The task force also included parking-lot attendants and police crime-prevention officers.

The task force examined the area's environmental conditions, and noted that a tall hedge surrounded one of the parking lots where many crimes were occurring. The hedge provided thieves with the concealment they needed to steal without detection. Accordingly, the hedge was cut down. Additional and higher-wattage lighting was installed around the lots. Large signs were placed at the lot entries, warning motorists about the risk of theft, and advising them to remove all valuables from their vehicles. The mounted police officers patrolled the lots more intensely, particularly between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., and 5 and 7 p.m. The mounted officers used cellular telephones to notify plainclothes officers of suspicious activity. Said Officer Anders Hedlund: "Sitting on horseback, we can look around far, and we are quite visible. Therefore, it's easy for us to track and frighten away thieves operating in the big parking lots."

In December 1995, a year before this initiative, 54 car crimes were reported in the target area of these parking lots. The number of reported car crimes in the target area dropped to six in December 1996, an 89 percent decrease. The crimes did not appear to have been displaced to the immediate surrounding area, as the number of such crimes in the entire Djurgården district also decreased. In 1995, 270 car crimes were reported to the police. This number dropped by 37 percent to 171 in 1996.\*

*Editors' note: This project is notable for the combination of education, environmental redesign and special patrol used to respond to the problem. The results are dramatic, and crime does not appear to have been displaced to the surrounding area.*

## **Additional Editors' Comments on Theft from Vehicles**

Thefts from vehicles, known variously by police as car cloutings, car prowls or vehicle burglaries, are among the most common reported crimes. Large cities experience these by the tens of thousands each year. And for every reported crime, there are probably two to three unreported crimes. Victims often make themselves vulnerable by leaving valuables in plain view. The efforts documented in this section show, among other things, how valuable hot-spot analysis can be in devising successful prevention measures.

---

\*Sources: Personal correspondence from Assistant Commissioner Stig Rösmark, Stockholm County Police Department, June 6, 1997, and Aug. 19, 1997, translating an article about the project in the Stockholm County Police Department's newsletter, 5 Goda Exempel (Five Good Examples) (this newsletter documents problem-oriented policing efforts in Stockholm).

The editors found several other approaches of note. A Philadelphia officer developed strategies to tackle the problem based on extensive interviews with a known, prolific offender. She promised him immunity from arrest in exchange for detailed information on his motivations and methods. In Washington, D.C., limited-duty officers surveil high vehicle-theft and theft-from-vehicle parking facilities. North Miami Beach, Fla., developed a "cellular citation," placed on windshields to warn owners that their visible cellular telephones were vulnerable to theft. San Diego police created a car prowl unit staffed completely by community volunteers trained in latent-prints and evidence collection.





## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
1100 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20530

To obtain details on COPS programs, call the  
U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 1.800.421.6770.

Visit the COPS internet web site:  
[www.usdoj.gov/cops](http://www.usdoj.gov/cops)

